

Looking up

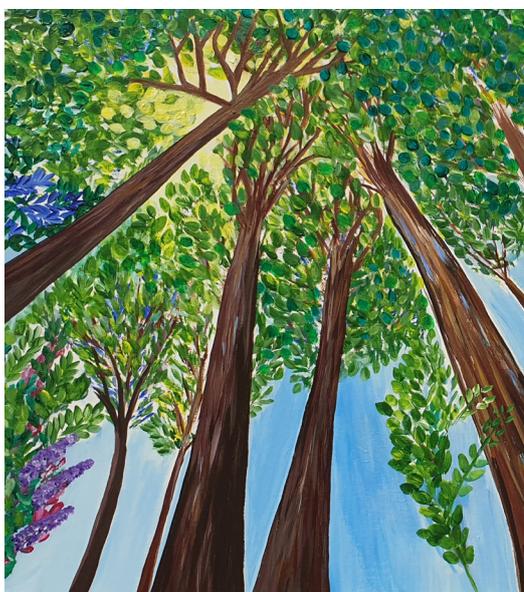
John 3.14-21

This passage comes out of an encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus, a prominent Jewish leader, has come to talk to Jesus under the cover of darkness, and given this context it is surely no coincidence that Jesus chooses the metaphors of light and dark to talk about himself and others. The passage includes one of, if not the best known verses in the New Testament: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'.

Now read **John 3.14-21** see p.2 for text.

A note on the passage

Respected and with a reputation to keep, Nicodemus fears to risk these things by fraternising with Jesus, a known radical. But his questions drive him to seek Jesus out, albeit under the cover of darkness. Jesus calls Nicodemus out of the darkness and into the light. Much later, strengthened by what he discovered through this encounter, Nicodemus is able to question the authorities about their treatment of Jesus. How will our deeds look when the light of God's love shines on them?



How can we show that we live in the light rather than the darkness?

Plant

You will need: terracotta pots, acrylic paints and brushes, sunflower seeds, potting compost.

Today is Mothering Sunday. Decorate a terracotta pot with acrylic paints, based on a sunny theme. Fill the pot with compost and plant one or two sunflower seeds in it. Put it in a bright, sunny spot and water regularly – not too much – until the seedling has grown strong. Then give the plant to your mum, or to a mother figure in your life, praying that she will know the light of Jesus in her life.

NB: sunflowers can be planted out into the garden but probably not until the middle of May.

REFLECT

Make a space as dark as possible – e.g. close the curtains, put on an eye mask. Sit in the darkness for five minutes. What does it feel like to be in the dark – comforting, safe, disorienting, scary? What kind of things happen in the dark? What do you think Jesus meant when he said that 'people loved darkness instead of light'?

Now make it as light as you can as suddenly as you can – switch on the lights or go out into the sun. Do your eyes feel assaulted by the sudden light? How do you feel, after sitting in the dark, to come into the light?

There is a level of discomfort to work through when we move from darkness into bright light – even though we know it's where we'd rather be. Can you create your own spiritual metaphor around this feeling?

WATCH

This serpent in this week's reading comes from an Old Testament story found in Numbers 21. Find a family-friendly version of the story at <https://tinyurl.com/MosesAndTheSnake>. When you've watched the animation, draw a snake and cut it out. Hang it up in your kitchen. At a family meal time each day this week, think about those you know who need to be healed in some way and, as you look at the snake, talk to God about them.



WALK

Go for a walk in your local neighbourhood (or further afield). Go alone and reflect quietly to yourself, or with others and talk together. As you walk, look for things that are living – e.g. people and creatures, grasses and flowers. Can you keep a tally? Think/talk about how light gives each of those things life.

LENT GARDEN OF RESPONSES

This week's passage tells us that God so loved the world that he gave Jesus. God gives us so many other things as well. Create a tree in your garden tray or on your garden page (that you've been progressing throughout Lent). Each day this week, write down something that you are thankful for, on a leaf, and put it on your tree.

Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.



It was night, and the streets were quiet. Nicodemus crept quietly away from his house into the darkness to find Jesus. He had lots of questions to ask him. But he wasn't sure he was going to understand the answers. He found Jesus and they started a conversation, but in many ways Nicodemus was in the dark. Jesus said to him, 'Just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.' But Nicodemus was confused and still in the dark.

Jesus continued, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life.'

Nicodemus began to smile, as light crept into his eyes.

'Indeed,' Jesus continued, 'God did not send his Son into the world to judge it, but so that he might save it. Those who believe in him are not judged; but those who do not believe are judged, because they do not believe in the only Son of God.'

The light began to dawn, as Jesus said, 'The light has come into the world. People loved darkness rather than light because what they did was evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come towards it, so that what they have done is not discovered. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that everyone can see that what they have done has been done in God.'

Nicodemus left Jesus as the darkness of night was over, and the dawn was bringing the light of a new day. **John 3.14-21**

Did you know?

- 'Being in the dark' is often used to mean not knowing or not understanding something.
- The bronze serpent, made by Moses, was said to have the power to heal someone from a poisonous snake bite.

John 3.14-21 (NRSV)

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned

already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.